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SUBJECT: MOI ARRESTS GENERAL, 17 OTHERS FOR KIDNAPPING

Classified By: POL Couns Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) In an Al Jazeera television interview on May 7, Minister of Interior (MoI) Bayan Jabr announced the arrest of an Iraqi Major General and 17 other ministry employees implicated in kidnapping and death squad activities (interview was reported by Reuters). He said that the officer "kidnapped citizens and in some cases killed them." In addition, the report included an acknowledgment by Jabr that MoI "also found a terror group in the 16th brigade that carries out killings of citizens," although it provided no further details on the status of that investigation.

¶2. (C) MNF-I has identified the general in the report as Abdul Al Haneen Faisal al Amir. Jabr's Chief of Staff confirmed to Emboff on May 8 that MG Haneen (as he is more commonly known) was arrested, along with 17 other policemen and bodyguards, for kidnapping. MG Haneen was previously the Chief of Police of Wasit, and was then promoted to the Chief of Police for one of Baghdad's two police districts (NOTE: MNF-I and MoI accounts differ on which district Haneen headed. END NOTE). One person, not connected to MoI, was found in the group's custody at the time of the arrest. The 18 officers are under investigation and are currently being held in a Baghdad-area MoI pre-trial detention facility.

¶3. (C) The most significant detail from Minister Jabr's staff was one that contradicted the report carried by Reuters. While media reports indicate that Minister Jabr charged the detainees with involvement in death squads, his office denied this statement. They maintain that the arrests were for kidnapping only.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Separate reports from Embassy and MNF-I sources indicate that these arrests may have taken place as long ago as March 29, and may have been based on other criminal activities such as theft and bribery. It would appear that these arrests mark the most dramatic step so far taken to address problems of illegal activities taken by Ministry of Interior officials. While we would welcome further indications that these arrests are the start of a comprehensive effort to rid MoI of corruption and extrajudicial activities, we must also be aware that news of the arrests came at a time when Bayan Jabr and his party (SCIRI) are fighting to hang on to the Ministry of Interior. END COMMENT.
KHALILZAD